



Montgomery County Council

From the Office of Councilmember Valerie Ervin

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Valerie Ervin Concludes One Year as President of the Montgomery County Council

[Complete Text of Her Remarks Included]

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ROCKVILLE, Md., December 6, 2011—Montgomery County Councilmember Valerie Ervin today concluded her one-year term as president of the Council. The complete text of her remarks reflecting upon the past year are as follows:

As I reflected on what I wanted to say today, I began thinking about what it has meant to be the President of the Montgomery County Council. For me it was about focusing on the kind of future we want for Montgomery County, standing up for what we believe in, and the importance of teamwork.

Last year, when I took the gavel as Council President, I promised to do my best to ensure that this Council would work together to get back to basics, focus on disciplined governing, and implement long-term structural changes in the interest of our community. I am proud to say that we accomplished all of these goals together.

The challenges this Council faced were focused on pocket-book economics and on maintaining the quality of life that our residents expect and deserve. In my estimation, we made the tough decisions that will keep this County on the course of greatness that has helped to determine why nearly a million people have chosen to live here, and why so many who are drawn to innovation and opportunity choose to work here.

Looking back over the past year, I am humbled by the support I received from my colleagues, and I am proud that this Council cast multiple unanimous votes on difficult issues. Council Vice President Roger Berliner's consistent search for common ground served this Council well this year, and I truly appreciate his service as the Council's vice president.

Some common themes emerged in our decision-making this year. We preserved essential services for our residents; attempted to do what was fair for employees and taxpayers; and took a long-term approach to protect our fiscal future. We took steps to preserve our world-class school system, to maintain safe neighborhoods, and to create economic opportunities to grow our tax base.

One of our biggest accomplishments was developing a “fiscal protection package” where we controlled growth in debt service and compensation costs, funded future employee obligations in a consolidated trust for retiree health benefit pre-funding across agencies, and strengthened County reserves.

This Council also took decisive action on economic development and land use issues to enhance the County’s position as a leader in the region. We celebrated the opening of the Fillmore in Silver Spring, broke ground on the mixed-use Safeway Project in Wheaton, and kicked-off stage one development at White Flint.

We voted for several economic development assistance packages including: grants to Choice Hotels International and Duball; assistance for Westfield; and most importantly a conditional grant over 15 years for Health and Human Services to retain 3,000 federal workers. In addition, we approved the initial funding for the newly established Biotechnology Investment Incentive Tax Credit Supplement Program. All of these actions help to leverage funding from the state for these projects.

This Council also recently passed the Wheaton Sector Plan. We hope that this plan will put Wheaton on the map as a destination for retail, housing and office uses. Situated on a metro line, this area is ripe for revitalization in the central business district. Our goal is to revitalize this area for community focused shopping, office uses and government activities.

Finally, this Council approved the CR Zone which will greatly influence the scope of future development near Metrorail stations. These changes will encourage more urbanized, mixed-use development in those areas, allowing neighborhoods to generate retail, restaurants, services, entertainment and offices near public transportation.

I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone on the Council’s staff. They are the backbone of this institution and their commitment to upholding the Council was never more evident than this year.

From the OLO report on the long-term structural budget deficit led by Karen Orlansky, to the incredible work of Essie McGuire on the MCPS budget and maintenance of effort, we are exceptionally well served by our staff. Steve Farber, our irrepressible staff director, cares so much about this body which is evidenced by his incredible work ethic, institutional knowledge and keen insights. We couldn’t have accomplished what we did this year without them. Linda Lauer, the clerk of the Council, does so much more than just keep the trains running on time. I owe her so much this year, not only for her professionalism but also because she is one of your best allies when things get tough. Mike Faden and Bob Drummer you are the best. And to the rest of the staff, I don’t have time to mention each one of you by name, but just know that when I walk through the door of this building, I know that the best staff in the state resides here, and we don’t

thank you enough for your dedication not only to us but to the residents of Montgomery County.

And finally to my own staff, I can't imagine working as a member of this Council without my team, which is lead by Sonya Healy, my chief of staff. You all know about her amazing work ethic, her attention to detail, her professionalism and no-nonsense approach to getting things done. But behind the curtain she is a loyal friend and confidante, with a heart that is bigger than most. Thank you for putting up with me and for putting your life on hold for a year. Rich Romer, Shondell Foster, and Beth Sylvester rounded out Team Ervin this year. They gave 100 percent every day, even when I wasn't looking.

I want to close by sharing my thoughts about *Sister Citizen*, a book written by Melissa Harris-Perry that has given me valuable insights into my experience this year. One important part explains how perceptions can influence reality and how it is often difficult to do the right thing in the face of adversity. It is couched in the struggle that many black women face.

The author describes one World War II study "where subjects were placed in a crooked chair in a crooked room and then asked to align themselves vertically. Some perceived themselves straight only in relation to their surroundings. Some people could be tilted by as much as 35 degrees and report that they were perfectly straight, simply because they were aligned with images that were equally tilted. But not everyone did this; some managed to get themselves more or less upright regardless of how crooked the surrounding images were."

Throughout my life, I have been placed in crooked rooms, whether it is dealing with prejudice and personal attacks, organizing poor women in factories who were struggling to make ends meet, or fighting on behalf of my own children to have equal access to a quality public education.

I am proud to say that throughout all of these experiences, I have been able to stand up straight, maintain my integrity and produce positive outcomes for the future. I want to thank you for allowing me to serve you and our nearly one million residents as Council President.

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